
Chapter One

Part 1: Creating *12 Million Black Voices*

In Chicago's Bronzeville, the 1940s was an unsettled time. As the United States emerged from the Great Depression and entered the Second World War, African Americans wondered whether this "crisis period in the history of Western Civilization" might bring a "flowering" in black communities or merely more of the same, wrote sociologists Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake.ⁱ Bronzeville's sense of life "in flux," its certainty of impending change both threatening and empowering, were widely shared. Black Americans increasingly saw their liberation struggle in a global perspective, a view enabled by the cosmopolitanism of urban life, by military experience abroad, and by the implacable advance of global anti-colonial movements that coalesced in pan-Africanism. Among domestic levers of change were the New Deal's liberal consensus and its social welfare measures, including not only the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and Civilian Conservation Corps, but also arts projects that supported and made visible a newly socially-conscious generation of black artists and writers.ⁱⁱ Most significant, however, was the Great Migration, the decades-long move from country to city that peaked during the war years, swelling and even doubling Northern cities' black populations by 1945. Life in Northern ghettos was often wretched - it was "our prison, our death sentence without a trial," wrote Richard Wright - but it was also the portal to a new and irrevocable black "worldliness," a modernity that would prove to be global, autonomous, and activist.ⁱⁱⁱ

Wright and his family joined the Northern exodus, reaching Chicago from Mississippi in 1927, and Wright set his best selling novel of 1940, *Native Son*, in the

Bronzeville neighborhoods where he lived.^{iv} In 1941, Wright's photograph and text book *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro* addressed African American history "in terms of the urbanization of a feudal folk."^v The characterization reminds us that even then, as he considered "the word 'Negro'" to be "a psychological island" formed by "the most unanimous fiat in all American history," Wright saw the African American migration as an element in a global population shift, a movement that would gain force throughout the twentieth century.^{vi} In 1947, Wright left the United States permanently, allying himself with pan-Africanist groups headquartered in Paris. Chapter XX discusses in detail *Black Power*, his 1953 reportage on the Gold Coast as it anticipated independence as Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African nation and the first of forty new nation states, their leaders and citizens primarily people of color, to emerge from former European colonies around the globe during the fifteen years after World War II.^{vii} *Black Power*, Wright had hoped, could use the appealing photo-text form developed in *12 Million* to represent for international readers modern Africa's complex black subjectivities. Wright's difficulties with the project, which never appeared with the extensive images he had prepared, are attributable to many factors; in retrospect, however, they underscore just how powerful, but also how precarious and short-lived, was the balance of forces that produced, and constrained, *12 Million* and the photographic coverages of Bronzeville that it spurred.

With Wright's text and photo-direction by Edwin Rosskam, *12 Million* appeared late in the series of books featuring photographs made for the New Deal's Farm Security Administration (FSA) photography project (1935-43), a series which included *American Exodus*, *Land of the Free*, and James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise*

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Famous Men.^{viii} FSA exhibit and book designer and erstwhile journalist Roskam meant to capitalize on the recent, enormous success of *Native Son* both by using Wright to compose the text and by presenting in photographs the Bronzeville conditions described in the novel. Wright's text, emphatically global, begins with an account of the slave trade set in the context of both African civilizations and the Euro-American Renaissance and follows the course of slavery as an economic system to the point of the Civil War, when the inevitability of industrialization made slaves and the "inheritors of slavery" seem "children of a devilish aberration, descendants of an interval of nightmare in history, fledglings of a period of amnesia...."^{ix} Writing in the present tense to detail the sharecrop system, African American life in the South, and the Great Migration in the Teens and Twenties, Wright inserts an italicized sermon prophesizing a new Jerusalem to dramatize the prospective migrants' "treasonable" hopes. Closing with one of the book's few statistics - "From 1890 to 1920, more than 2,000,000 of us left the land" - Wright sets the migrants' sharpest contact with "the brutal logic of jobs," the Northern "world of *things*," and "the beginning of living on a new and terrifying plane of consciousness,"^x specifically during World War I.

Though the narrative is set primarily in the past, the book's photographs were all contemporary. Wright visited Washington early in 1941 to view the FSA collection, which covered most aspects of Southern black agricultural life and labor. At some point an extensive FSA coverage of the Chicago Black Belt was decided on; images from this work would accompany Wright's two final chapters on urban life. This photography was done by Russell Lee and by Roskam, who acted as both photographer and project coordinator, during the first two weeks of April 1941. Working in the neighborhoods of

cramped and deteriorating "kitchenette" apartments which were home to migrants, the photographers recorded a chilling account of Northern urban life, where, Wright writes, the death rate exceeded the birth rate, so that "if it were not for the trains and autos bringing us daily into the city from the plantations, we black folks who dwell in northern cities would die out entirely over the course of a few years."^{xi} Nevertheless, the pictures were intended in their totality to show "the black belt [as] an environment,"^{xii} including both the miseries of kitchenette living and the home life and community networks that South Side residents struggled to create.

In his brief concluding chapter "Men in the Making," Wright assigns his collective voice to "the children of the black sharecroppers, the first-born of the city tenements,"^{xiii} denoting not "African Americans as they were, but as they were becoming," as literary historian Kenneth Warren writes.^{xiv} For black Americans, Wright insists, the journey North over "the common road of hope,"^{xv} made by "thousands of poor migrant whites"^{xvi} as well as by blacks, is necessary and inevitable. Ending on a note of hope and affirmation, he places blacks "with the new tide," maintaining that "[h]undreds of thousands of us are moving into the sphere of conscious history."^{xvii}

Of some 1500 images initially printed from the photographic coverage, 420 now remain at the Library of Congress.^{xviii} Though described officially as supplementing the FSA file by showing Chicago as a major "terminus of ...migration,"^{xix} the work was actually specifically intended "for the book Ed is doing with Richard Wright" as FSA administrator Clara Dean Wakeham wrote to staff photographer Jack Delano. Her letter warned him as well that this information was "off the record... and not to be talked about" - presumably because FSA photographs were intended to serve as neutral, official records

rather than as material for projects specified in advance (and Wright's Communist Party ties may also have seemed problematic).^{xx}

Also not talked about in FSA correspondence and records is the fact that Wright was in Chicago with the photographers, providing guidance and advice during the shoot, so that, Rosskam noted in a later interview, "I don't know if many white men had the opportunity to see it the way we saw it." Wright had formed an abiding interest in photography and was an accomplished amateur; the first edition of *12 Million* includes one photograph by him and, as discussed in Chapter XX, he undertook his own photographic coverage for some of his later books. Not only did "Dick Wright...[know] everybody in the Negro world of Chicago," so that the photographers "did everything from the undertaker to the gangster" as Rosskam said, but he was able as well to draw on the resources of his friend sociologist Horace Cayton, then director of the Good Shepherd Community Center, who arranged many locations and contacts (Wright later contributed the preface to Cayton and St. Clair Drake's 1945 Chicago study *Black Metropolis*).^{xxi} The omission from official records of both Wright's and Cayton's involvement in the FSA's initial Chicago South Side coverage, discussed in Part 2 of this chapter, has encouraged scholarly oversight of what may be the first extensive photographic documentation of urban African American life over which blacks themselves had significant control.

As Paul Gilroy has emphasized, Wright's work in the 1940s occupied, simultaneously, a "relationship with the Book-of-the-Month Club," whose main selection of *Native Son* marked "an entirely new phenomenon for a black writer approaching the cultural mainstream of American society," and "a central place in the radical political culture of the international communist movement."^{xxii} *12 Million Black Voices*, similarly

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overarching, conjoined the work of United States government employees with that of an acknowledged Communist Party member; as well, upon publication its unambiguous import, delineating the grounds of the long civil rights struggle soon to be underway in the United States, resonated in many quarters. It was featured in Book-of-the Month Club literature, offered free with a subscription to the Communist Party magazine *New Masses*, respectfully reviewed in mainstream periodicals, and investigated for seditious statements by the FBI.^{xxiii} *12 Million* became an "instant Bible" for photographer Gordon Parks, and Langston Hughes taught it in creative writing courses.^{xxiv} Throughout her career, artist Carrie Mae Weems has paid explicit homage to the book.^{xxv} FSA Section Head Roy Stryker praised "an unusually fine piece of work," staff photographer John Collier wished for "such a publication every month,"^{xxvi} and the liberal *PM* magazine recommended it as "a study of Negro life from the inside, by one who has lived it, rather than a chock-full-of-dates textbook."^{xxvii} Ordinary readers wrote to commend Wright for "dignifying, analyzing and depicting our suffering people in the stream of American life," as William P. Robinson said; to exclaim that "words can't explain how thrilled I was to see one of us write about our treatment and conditions"; and to tell him "how deeply I was moved...you have said the things that I would have said if I were the author."^{xxviii}

In the first edition, a luxurious gravure printing process brings out both the rich tones and the fine detail in the negatives, most made with a medium format camera. The photographs are printed large, generally half-page to full-page size, and frequent double page spreads or multiple page sequences of photographs interrupt the text. Roskam "bled" images to the edges of their pages in all the books he designed, and the placement has subtle but definite connotations. The lack of any containing frame dissociates the images from the status of mere illustration, or specimen-like evidence, and the suggestion

of indefinite extension, rather than specific containment, of the images' often-dark backgrounds implies the dialectics of placelessness and boundedness - the ever-present diasporic dislocations - that are posited in the verbal text. Rosskam's arty, informal layout and printing modes, like many of his images, emphasize photography's expressive and symbolic possibilities, underscoring the construction rather than transparency of even government-produced documentary work, and they enhance the poetic qualities of Wright's text even as the book presents a chronicle of hardship and struggle.

Many of the richly-toned images appear uncaptioned, and others bear brief captions in boldface which repeat phrases from the text. Even these minimal captions serve, like other repetitions in Wright's text, as emphasis rather than addition; this arrangement encourages us to be active viewers as well as readers, allowing each often-arresting and always interesting print to offer up its meanings over time, because we cannot rely on the quick fix of an anchoring caption. As in James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, also published that year, with Evans's uncaptioned FSA pictures, an implication may be that the text as a whole "captions" each and every image, just as all the images amplify the whole of the text.

The FSA wanted to promote its photographs "in the area of what you might call 'art'" in 1941, Rosskam has noted, and he claimed for photo-text books generally an impact that was "still...startling and new and exciting."^{xxix} At least one reviewer agreed, seeing in the book the "promise [of] ... a new literary form."^{xxx} In the final stages of composition, Rosskam assured Wright that, seeing "the pictures and dummy," he would be surprised "how the pictures will help" with his final draft of the two urban chapters, which "say the most important things in the whole book."^{xxxi} Perhaps overstated, Rosskam's assertions nevertheless seem to suggest a view requiring of "art"

that any claims to valid esthetic innovation be inclusive of enlightened racial understanding as well; the actual or imminent visual subjects of any truly innovative practice must encompass representations of African Americans that were, as Roy DeCarava was soon to say, "serious," "artistic," and universally "human."^{xxxii} That Roskam located such farsighted possibilities specifically in documentary photography suggests the extent (discussed further in Part 2) to which visual culture in general offered only caricature, stereotype, and abjection.^{xxxiii}

As we have seen, Wright's text could hardly state more explicitly the centrality he assigned to the dynamics of migration and the consciousness it produced. Wright had written in "Blueprint for Negro Writing" that "[r]educed to its simplest and most general terms, theme for Negro writers will rise from understanding the meaning of their being transplanted from a 'savage' to a 'civilized' culture in all of its social, political, economic, and emotional implications."^{xxxiv} Wright's own statements about *12 Million*, as well as early notes and of course the published text itself, make clear how directly he shaped the book to fulfill this prescription. It was from the sociological studies of migration dynamics and adjustment to urban life then current at the University of Chicago, Wright has written, that he "drew the meanings" for his "documentary book," *12 Million*, as well as for his novel *Native Son*.^{xxxv} Concepts he found in the work of Robert E. Park, Robert Redfield, and Louis Wirth aided him to articulate - and encouraged him to valorize - the migrants' experiences. Especially important among these was the positive value which Park assigned to urbanism and to the marginalization occasioned by its inevitable ethnic heterogeneity. The urban "marginal man," wrote Park, in the very isolation and torment of "spiritual instability, intensified self-

consciousness, restlessness, and *malaise*," is the harbinger of the most progressive and enlightened phases of "civilization": "It is in the mind of the marginal man - where the changes and fusion of culture are going on - that we can best study the processes of civilization and progress."^{xxxvi} Such concepts bolstered Wright's Marxist analysis and supported his emphasis on the transnationalism of African American historical consciousness. At the same time, they enabled readers to grant primacy to a U.S. national narrative. Wright argues that,

brutal, bloody, crowded with suffering and abrupt transitions, the lives of us black folk represent the most magical and meaningful picture of human experience in the Western world. Hurlled from our native African homes into the very center of the most complex and highly industrialized civilization the world has ever known, we stand today with a consciousness and memory such as few people possess.^{xxxvii}

And, crucially, he contends as well that blacks and whites are bound by "deeper" ties than those that separate us, and claims that "black ... history and ... present being are a mirror of all the manifold experiences of America..." Suggesting that "what we want, what we represent, what we endure is what America is," and that "*we are you*," Wright insists that "if America has forgotten her past, then let her look into the mirror of our consciousness and she will see the *living* past living in the present, for our memories go back, through our black folk of today, through the recollections of our black parents, and through the tales of slavery told by our black grandparents, to the time when none of us, black or white, lived in this fertile land."^{xxxviii}

Some of Wright's most lyrical - and thematically central - passages, as well as the inclusion of photography, thus appear as efforts to rework specific sociological concepts

in a vernacular register. (Although the appeal of the term "folk," rather than "people," which had been Wright's designation for the African American collectivity in early drafts, may have lain in its more "neutral" and scientific connotations.) There was, however, as literary historian John Reilly points out, an additional theoretical underpinning - and formal paradigm - for *12 Million*; this is the political concept of nationalism, as Wright encountered it in Marxist theory and buttressed it with sociological thesis. Stalin's *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, which Wright credited with moving him to "the first total emotional commitment of my life," explicated the nation in Leninist theory as an "historically constituted, stable community..., formed on the basis of [possessing] a common language, ... territory, ...economic life...,and ... psychological make-up," all "manifested in common specific features of national culture" - with or without an achieved national state.^{xxxix} In 1928 the Communist Party proclaimed African Americans an oppressed nation with a right to self-determination, and Wright learned of the Bolsheviks' support for regional autonomy for national minorities within the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Intellectuals, Wright concluded, had encouraged the preservation of rural folk cultures and fostered literacy and self-consciousness, "given these tongueless people a language, newspapers, institutions," as a step toward "unity on a national scale." "How different this was from the way in which Negroes were sneered at in America," he wrote, and he planned in his work to show "the kinship between the sufferings of the Negro and the sufferings of other people."^{xl} In *Blueprint*, Wright had outlined the role of the writer in such a nationalist cultural renaissance, arguing that "the Negro writer must realize within the area of his own personal experience those impulses which, when prefigured in terms of broad social movements, constitute the stuff of

nationalism." In *12 Million*, claims Reilly, Wright's "amalgamation of his migrant's experience and his tutelage in science" form a "perfect metaphor" that "gives Black national consciousness expression."^{xli}

Reilly's insightful reading further suggests that Wright's text (he makes no mention of the book's photographs or of Edwin Rosskam) not only refers to but also embodies central aspects of the national culture it means to represent. Noting features that mark the text's relation to oral narrative, Reilly claims that Wright has "taken on" the style of a "vernacular orator" to offer a "simulated sermon," a performed narration whose form, rhetoric, and theme were familiar to its intended black audience, even as they also conveyed the "vanguard writer's" philosophy of secular history and conception of nationalism. "Tak[ing] as the text to preach the people themselves," the orating voice tells "how they were ripped from the civilization of Africa, brutalized on the middle passage, and thrown amidst savagery in slavery."^{xlii} At the same time, Wright "compromises" the "authority" that might accrue to such a speaker by using the collective pronoun "we" throughout the book and by using primarily the present tense. "...[T]he privileged act of narrating and testifying is shared among 12 million subjects;" and tongueless people are given voice, for "the audience is already participating as it hears/reads its story." Authority is thus located in the experience of the audience itself; its consenting reception of narration affirms its own authority and "acknowledg[es] the continuous significance of Afro-American history in its consciousness." The "final lesson of the national sermon," proclaims Reilly, is that African Americans can become "their own historical subject," and that, undertaking such a self-creation, they will transcend nationalism to become "the truly representative modern people."^{xliii}

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Although Reilly calls *12 Million* "a synthesis of inherited cultural forms, concepts of social evolution, and innovative techniques by which 'sincere art and honest science' would enrich each other," he merely implies, and never engages, the book's photographic intertext.^{xliv} As Gilroy points out, in later writing Wright consistently referred to his own dislocated perspective as "double vision," rather than using W.E.B. DuBois's term "double consciousness," and many commenters have noted the salience of visual tropes throughout Wright's fiction.^{xlv} Wright himself acknowledged that the book's crucial impetus came from Roskam's suggestion that he "write the text for a group of [FSA] pictures," and he found in the FSA file a "comprehensive picture of our country" offering "quite an education." Only nineteen Chicago pictures ultimately appeared in *12 Million*; the rest show African Americans throughout the rural and small town South, and in Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and New York. Most were made by FSA photographers; only several images of racial confrontation - a lynching, a Washington, D.C. demonstration, and two scenes of urban street battles - came from photo-agencies. Describing the file as "one of the most remarkable collections of photographs in existence," Wright told an interviewer that he and Roskam "looked at thousands" to select the eighty-six used in the book.^{xlvi}

Part 2: Covering Bronzeville

Bronzeville, the site of Wright's formative years, was a "city within a city," the "second largest Negro city in the world," in the 1940s, Drake and Cayton wrote in *Black Metropolis*. The South Side, seven miles long and one and a half miles wide, stretched from Twenty-second to Sixty-third streets between Wentworth and Cottage Grove, its boundaries resolutely fixed by whites' intimidation and restrictive covenants. Supporting

500 churches and 300 doctors, it was the “capital of black America” in the 1940s, supplanting Harlem as the center of black culture and nationalist sentiment, home to such notables as Joe Lewis, Mahalia Jackson, Congressman William Dawson, *Defender* newspaper editor John Sengstacke, *Ebony* magazine publisher John H. Johnson, and Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Its flourishing literary and artistic circles constituted a “Chicago Renaissance” comparable to Harlem’s earlier flowering.^{xlvii}

As African Americans became more urban than rural by the 1960s, Chicago absorbed wave after wave of newcomers. The Depression years saw a 20% increase in the city's black population, who lived for the most part in merciless overcrowding. Population density was 70,000 per square mile on the South Side; the death rate exceeded the birth rate by 2%. During the war years some 60,000 more new arrivals between 1942 and 1944 swelled the black population to 337,000, one-tenth of the city's total, and double what it had been before World War II.^{xlviii} Buildings abandoned and condemned in the 1930s were reinhabited during these years as the Black Belt remained, in Richard Wright's words, “an undigested lump in Chicago's melting pot.”^{xlix} Nevertheless, bolstered by relative affluence and increasing education, activists for civil rights, and attuned to new media and technologies, the postmigration generations Wright called the “first-born of the city tenements” enjoyed and produced a various and sophisticated culture now familiar worldwide.¹

The New Deal’s federal Farm Security Administration (FSA) supported a photography project to record and publicize conditions in rural areas and in the towns and cities that were the destinations of rural migration. In addition to Lee and Roskam’s 1941 South Side coverage, later that year FSA photographer John Vachon visited, and in

1942, Jack Delano, working for the OWI, made hundreds more photographs there. Little seen until recently, the photographs seem to respond to the community's sense that the moment's epochal social change at once recognized African Americans' painful history and initiated a vision of an American future.^{li} At once commemorating and interrogating the struggles, styles, and structures of black urban life in segregated America, the pictures are compelling today just as they were in the 1940s, when Cayton commended their "sharp and graphic terms."^{lii}

The immediate purpose for making and circulating FSA pictures during the New Deal was to publicize and build support for President Franklin Roosevelt's programs specifically combating rural poverty and promoting the resettlement of citizens displaced by agricultural depression, drought, and technological advance during the Great Depression. From the Section's very beginning in 1935, its director, Roy Emerson Stryker, attracted young photographers who would prove to be enormously inspired and talented. Including Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and the artist Ben Shahn, they envisioned an autonomous mandate that encompassed the creation of a visual record of the country as it emerged from depression and entered the Second World War. Stryker, trained in sociology and economics, was familiar with earlier social documentary photography and believed in its potential to reveal harsh social truths to an often-complacent middle class, provoking needed reform. Stryker and the Section photographers were advantaged by advances in camera technology and in mass reproduction techniques; smaller, more flexible cameras and faster film allowed them to dramatize photography's truth claim with freshly spontaneous, seemingly immediate, imagery, and they could circulate pictures to vast and appreciative audiences gathered by the new mass pictorial magazines.

Focusing initially on rural Southerners and Midwesterners, the photographers

soon regularly visited farms, small towns, and cities throughout the country. One fifth of images were “project shots,” duly recording the benefits provided by government-funded initiatives ranging from the Shasta Dam to the Ida B. Wells Houses in Chicago, and the files include a considerable amount of industrial work, labor protest, and urban life.^{liii} When the Section was transferred to the OWI in 1942, the photographers helped to support the war effort; in the Section’s final year, Stryker directed them to concentrate on “shipyards, steel mills, aircraft plants, oil refineries, and always the happy American worker.”^{liv} The pictures, now stored at the Library of Congress and available to the public, total approximately 200,000. They constitute an extraordinary archive, no less today than when Richard Wright praised it in 1941.^{lv}

In recent years, scholarship has traced the project’s institutional history, delineated careers of individual photographers, and debated both the project’s and the photographers’ contributions and limitations. Critiques have foregrounded the FSA’s valorization of programmatic, government-engineered progress rather than grassroots initiative, and they have noted the ways that some Historical Section pictures cast their subjects as the passive objects of relief measures rather than active social agents. Nevertheless, the Section’s work has remained a paradigm of documentary practices and esthetics; it is seen to exemplify the use of photography as a way not only of “comprehending patterns of culture and social organization,” as Sally Stein has written, but also of graphically revealing them to large audiences.^{lvi}

The immediate circumstances of the United States in these years - including the ways that the public apprehended news and social facts just before television - have receded from popular memory, even as some Section images remain globally-recognized icons. They stand out even now in our dense and pervasive visual culture, and we can readily imagine how powerfully they signaled a new visual aesthetic at the dawn of mass circulated photojournalism in the 1930s. The vast majority of pictures in the FSA file, often less graphically arresting, remain richly informative. They bear witness not only to

material conditions, but also to the photographers' determination to record and express important social and cultural truths, including the changes they perceived as industrialization and urban and suburban migration intensified, and defense industries expanded. Today we can trace these developments clearly in the pictures.

Like *Black Metropolis*, the FSA pictures of Chicago record social stratification and class differences. They show some of the poised, socially prominent figures often seen in newspapers such as the *Defender*, *Courier* or *Chicago Bee*, and soon to be featured in *Ebony* magazine. But they also include everyday life and everyday tasks in a variety of workplaces, as well as scenes of leisure, worship, and performance. The pictures do not gloss over the enormous problems caused by extreme overcrowding and employment discrimination long suffered on the South Side and worsened by the Great Depression - indeed, Cayton wrote upon viewing the 1500 images that made up the coverage that "I, who had helped to pick out the scenes and had worked with [the photographers] in Chicago, could not believe what I had seen." Describing the "drabness, squalor, horror and poverty" shown in many images as "too much for me to longer put credence in my own senses," he proclaimed that such extreme misery "just couldn't exist in America...but it does [author's ellipses]." His Pittsburgh *Courier* review of *12 Million* concluded that the "simplicity, directness, and force" of the book's pictures and text present black city life "as [the story] has never been told before."^{lvii}

Cayton's dramatized response is tellingly of its moment, insisting as much on the performative power of photography as on the suffering that is its subject. Differently from Roskam's ambitions for photographic "art," Cayton seems to see in the photographs and in *12 Million* itself an unassailable immediacy that newly presents black city life; he suggests that this image-based authenticity can powerfully transgress the discursive determinants of comfortably "American" existence. Although Cayton's comments markedly omit any notice of the purposeful variety of social and economic status in the coverage, even if such variety might have strengthened his claim for the

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photographs' transgressive power, his words echo others' calls to attend to the power of the visual. They resonate strikingly with James Agee's demand, published the same year in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, that the camera, the "central instrument of the time," be dedicated to "the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is."^{lviii} They recall as well the opening sentences of Wright's text in *12 Million*, which proclaims that African Americans are "not what we seem" as suggested by our "our outward guise." To look beyond that "old familiar aspect" is to perceive "an uneasily tied knot of pain and hope whose snarled strands converge from many points of time and space."^{lix} And yet, in accord with Roskam's strictures and Wright's prescient embrace of "double vision," they project the hope that black photography, as it entered at that unsettled moment into the discourses of art, photojournalism, and documentary, could reconfigure these cultural structures just as political contestation remade laws and customs, and made new nations.

The Chicago images greatly increased the FSA's holdings of both African American and urban subject matter - they were, in fact, the project's largest organized coverage of city life. Except for the nineteen pictures used in *12 Million*, however, most, apparently not circulated to media outlets, never appeared in print before the 1970s. Because the coverage was apparently never intended for current publication, the photographers were relatively unconstrained by the racist strictures of prevailing media practices. Deploying photography in the service of something other than racial prejudice, the Chicago team could show, perhaps, "the cruel radiance of what is."

The extent and viciousness of then-current stereotype cannot be overemphasized. "The large number and variety of inherently racist images in American culture attest to a particularly American preoccupation with marginalizing black Americans by flooding the culture with an-Other Negro, a Negro who conformed to the deepest social fears and fantasies of the larger society," writes Henry Louis Gates.^{lx} It was not only the "tens of thousands" of negative caricatures appearing as cartoons, postcards, salt and pepper shakers, tea cosies, children's games, and dolls, but also the determined exclusion of

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African Americans from all white-controlled purportedly objective mass media visual content that executed that "preoccupation" into the mid twentieth century.^{lxi} Until the early 1950s, for instance, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* had a "rule that blacks were not to appear in photographs it published, not even as part of a background," writes journalism historian Ira Harkey.^{lxii} Jessie Jackson has recalled a hometown paper with "never a picture of a Black wedding" nor "a story about a local Black businessman" nor "a decent obituary,"^{lxiii} and in his memoirs of a 1950s boyhood Gates remembers being "starved for images of ourselves," "search[ing]" television and "devour[ing]" *Ebony* and *Jet* to find them.^{lxiv}

Unsurprisingly, images produced and controlled by African Americans under segregation generally took pains to present the strongest possible contrast to racist representations. African Americans have been photographers since the medium's invention in 1840, their early work attesting to ethnic and class diversities in American communities not necessarily represented elsewhere.^{lxv} Nevertheless, such images, only a tiny proportion of those produced overall, were often private, family possessions, not intended to be published or publically circulated. Commissioned portraits, more likely to appear in public, white controlled public spheres of visual representation, presented an iconography "carefully chosen to counter in every respect the gross caricatures of blackness" so long familiar, as Camara Dia Holloway notes in her study of Harlem studio photographer James L. Allen.^{lxvi} Allen's urban achievers avoided broad gestures and assumed "serious facial expressions" as a "means of distancing themselves from minstrelsy." Striving to signify "civility, urbanity, and modernity," photographers posed sitters on the diagonal "to generate a dynamism that was associated with the bourgeois, i.e. respectable, subject," writes Holloway.^{lxvii} In the realm of photojournalism, "[w]e showed the productive side of our people," explained former Pittsburgh *Courier* city editor Frank Bolden, because "[s]howing people in squalor didn't contribute anything to the community."^{lxviii}

The FSA/OWI file contains about 7,500 images of or relating to African Americans, a proportional figure exceeding that of any other federal government collections, and the agency employed at least one “race advisor” responsible for distributing material to the Negro press, whose editors relied on the Section for pictures that showed “improvement in black lives,” as one information officer recalled.^{lxix} Nevertheless, Roy Stryker, like other New Deal publicists intent on winning support for their programs, saw his larger goal as demonstrating that government agencies could “put blacks to work” even while “reaffirming deeply entrenched economic and cultural structures,” suggests historian Nicholas Natanson.^{lxx} Though Stryker believed that the Historical Section had “always been interested in the negro (sic) problems and had “[always] taken pictures portraying [them],” he seems often to have set aside such concerns in dealing with the media.^{lxxi} “Place the emphasis on the white tenants, since we know that these will receive much wider use...,” he had advised Dorothea Lange pragmatically in 1937.^{lxxii}

Like other experienced FSA staffers, Lee and Roskam were experts at long-standing field procedures. They had learned to work skillfully from shooting scripts composed to direct attention to aspects of a region, activity, or topic. Developed for particular photographers undertaking specific itineraries or simply addressed to “All Photographers,” scripts might emphasize newsworthiness or a relevant upcoming governmental initiative, or they might outline “gaps in the file,” as one script actually was titled. They directed photographers to background reading and to local authorities and experts, but they also reminded them of their prospective viewing audiences. The scripts encouraged photographers to envision a connective narrative thread for their coverages so that, later, the Section could easily offer picture sets as complete photo-essays to newspapers and magazines.

Scripts have generally been attributed to Stryker, though photographers themselves sometimes wrote them. Roskam and Jack Delano, for instance, suggested

that the “American way of life” be covered with specific focus on “the average big city dweller,” including topics such as unions, churches, sports, and amusements.^{lxxiii} Lee proposed in late 1941 to address the place of “mechanical things” in American life, calling for a range of subjects from “Baby in father’s lap in the driver’s seat” to “Child making model airplane,” to “Vocational Training high school.”^{lxxiv} Working primarily as a Washington-based photo-editor concerned with building the file and photographing only occasionally, Rosskam recalls composing “well researched” scripts of up to twenty pages.^{lxxv}

There does not seem to have been a script for the Chicago coverage; the logic of familiar FSA procedures, combined with Wright’s and Cayton’s guidance, apparently sufficed. Rosskam certainly, and Lee perhaps, had read early drafts of Wright’s text. They agreed that urban life was the “terminal point” of migration and were prepared to show similarities rather than differences among Americans.^{lxxvi} (This idea Lee may have had in mind when he wrote Stryker just after the Chicago shoot that in his brief file captions he had “tried to avoid too much mention” of his subjects “being Negro.”)^{lxxvii} However, the coverage ultimately extended well beyond Wright’s text, relying on materials furnished by Cayton, who wrote to Wright early on of his “outline of the broad fields of social life” and his efforts to “line up...appointments, individuals,...and scenes.”^{lxxviii} Cayton also provided data from the three years of fieldwork he had directed with sociologist Lloyd Warner on the South Side in the late 1930s, work that underpins not only *Black Metropolis* but also several studies published prior to it.^{lxxix} Their 800-page book, “the best comprehensive description of black life in an American city even written,” studied the South Side according to then-current methods of community research.^{lxxx}

The Cayton-Warner research, as this fieldwork was called, used a large staff of WPA-paid fieldworkers (including Wright, Katherine Dunham, and Fenton Johnson), who were trained to view a community “not as an atomic sand pile of separate individuals, but as a

set of interconnected human beings living in a vast web of vital relations,” as Warner wrote. The workers investigated “all aspects of the life of a people to learn how the parts fit together and to understand how each of the interconnected parts functions in maintaining a social system and an ongoing way of life.”^{lxxxix} In the case of Chicago, it was possible to study the “effects of subordination and exclusion” in an industrial “metropolitan area with great social complexity.” Thus the study “anatomizes” Bronzeville spatially according to various socio-economic indicators, and it organizes its approach to recording life experience along five “‘axes of life’ around which individual and community life revolves ” in every social class.^{lxxxii} These - some more amenable to visual representation than others - were: staying alive, having a good time, praising God, getting ahead, and advancing the race. Evidently, a decision was made not to visit major industrial sites outside the unofficial boundaries of Bronzeville, and it seems likely that access to workplaces such as the stockyards, steel mills, and Pullman works was difficult to obtain.^{lxxxiii} Nevertheless, from the beginning Lee had no trouble finding a “wealth of subject matter” in “social and business activities,” as he reported to Stryker mid-project, naming familiar topics “ranging from church life to taverns,” and from “coffin manufacturing” to “5+10 cent stores.”^{lxxxiv}

Though not precisely consonant with the Cayton-Warner “lines of attention” that claim “the time and money of Bronzeville,” Roskam’s general captions, used to organize the photographs, are based on these five axes.^{lxxxv} Such picture captioning consumed “many long hours, [extending] far into the night,” remembers Jack Delano.^{lxxxvi} Photographers generally sent their film to be developed and printed in Washington as they completed each assignment; work prints were then returned to them in the field for captioning, every photographers’ responsibility. In addition to brief captions affixed to each image, many wrote longer general captions; often, like Roskam’s, they are detailed and colorful. Though stored separately from the pictures in Washington, they remain publically available.

Commented [CC6]: Citation? Is this quote by Warner, and if so, what text?

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Although Lee suggested that Rosskam's "general caption[s] .. ideally, should be filed with the pictures," they apparently were not, so that it is no longer possible fully to reconstruct his original groupings of the photographs.^{lxxxvii} Though the pictures probably were never viewed in these groups, and some, such as the very extensive coverage of staff and patients at Provident Hospital (Figure 1), or Lee's workplace portraits of skilled craftspeople at the Chicago *Defender* plant (Figures 2 and 3), seem not to fit readily into Rosskam's headings, the captions offer invaluable context. Rosskam provides an overview of the South Side in two lengthy general caption texts - "The Face of the 'Black Belt'" and "The Black Belt - An Environment," offering historical statistics from the Cayton-Warner research and from the government's 1941 Tolson Committee Report on Migration. Here we read in brief outline the major features of the community's unbearably overcrowded, deteriorated, and expensive housing, 50% unemployment rate, and consequent omnipresent health hazards. Relevant are Rosskam's and Lee's many, evocative exterior shots of houses and street life. [Caption facsimiles to be provided.]

Specific captions - "Kitchenette," "Railroad Worker's Family," "Relief Family," "Recent Immigrants," and "Pattern for Growing Up" - focus on home life, and four additional sections - "The Day of a Negro Doctor," "Night," "Negro Church," "Holiday," and "Demonstration Area" - further organize the photographs. Some texts seem disappointingly self-evident, Rosskam's "Night," for instance, adding little to lively pictures such as Lee's "Saturday Night in a barroom on the South Side" (Figure 4), but "Kitchenette" and "Pattern for Growing Up" present the kinds of detailed information and sociological perspective that the Cayton-Warner research established.

Quoting *12 Million Black Voices*, Rosskam's general caption "Negro Church" emphasized the "tide of passion" that lifted up a fundamentalist congregation; on Sunday it was "easy to hear fervent crescendoes issuing from three or four places within the same block." Spending Easter in Bronzeville, he and Lee observed not any Sunday, but a "Holiday" on which community tradition sanctioned display, the parishioners outside

their churches observing codes of urbane self-presentation as intricate as the rituals of worship enacted inside. The occasion mandated not only worship, but festivity; the pictures show lily vendors lounging as they await a sale, children in line for a movie matinee, and elegantly bonneted parishioners, posing for each other, or perhaps for the society page photographer. The Easter pictures constitute the largest coverage of a single Chicago topic; divided among four churches, they indicate a range of denominations and show the church's central role in communal life as sponsor or supporter of clubs, dances, radio broadcasts, and weekday as well as Sunday services.

During services at All Nations Pentecostal Church, and at a modest storefront Church of God in Christ, the photographers were permitted inside, if only briefly. Though Lee's lighting must have been distracting, the pictures seem unposed, the worship service and Bible study genuine (Figures 5-10). All Nations' remarkable founder and leader, Elder Lucy Smith (Figure 5), perhaps best-known among leaders of working class congregations and certainly best known among Chicago's women pastors, was a "healer" and regular radio personality. She had managed in a mere ten years to leave a storefront and establish her congregation in the large, modern church building shown in Lee's pictures.^{lxxxviii}

The Sunday pictures contributed as well a record of Easter observances among middle class churchgoers. At distinctly fashionable St. Edmund's Episcopal, the photographers worked in the street with 35mm cameras before and during the processional "Blessing of the Bounds" ceremony (Figures 11-17). St. Edmund's sophisticated, socially prominent congregants were staples of the black press, Roskam points out in "Holiday," but their resemblance to white "Society" did (and does) not attract the attention white documentarians and photojournalists pay to the "ecstatic character" of fundamentalist worship. Among Baptists, the South Side's largest denomination, the photographers chose imposing Pilgrim Baptist, then one of Chicago's largest churches. Its sustaining membership was 1,500, and it was home to renowned

choirmaster, composer, music publisher, and “Father of Gospel” Thomas Dorsey. Photographing after a service, Lee caught parishioners as they stopped to chat outside the graceful Sullivan and Adler building, once a synagogue (Figure 18).^{lxxxix}

Lamenting black and white photography’s inability to portray the “rainbow of color in both men’s and women’s clothing,” Rosskam pronounced himself “continually astonish[ed]” at the “high standard of appearance” even among impoverished kitchenette dwellers. The holiday crowds offered opportunities for expressive street work. Relatively rare in FSA assignments, such casual urban scenes, caught by small cameras with sensitive film and sharp lenses, were familiar by 1941 in Henri Cartier-Bresson’s much-published images, as well as in the New York City photographs of former FSA staff members Walker Evans and Ben Shahn. Lee’s street images generally do not depart from his familiar straightforward style, but Rosskam evidently welcomed the chance to experiment with the relative spontaneity granted by the “miniature” camera. Many of his images place their unposed subjects in crowded or fragmented compositions, their off-kilter frames replete with now-iconic signs of a distinctly modern urbanity (Figures 19-23).^{xc}

The sequences of family members at home were made by Lee, a master of then novel synchronous flash lighting. They show that the photographers not only posed family members together but also asked them to undertake routine tasks such as laundry, ironing, or meal preparation. The resulting images - such as “Washday of a family on relief” - unsparingly revealed the time-consuming drudgery of the most basic housekeeping in often-wretched conditions (Figure 24).

Lee was more prolific and more often in the field than other FSA colleagues.^{xcj} Hired in 1936 with a background in both science and art, he continued to work with Stryker at various non-FSA projects throughout the 1940s. So numerous are his pictures that his style stands almost as the generic face of the FSA; yet, his methods and philosophy are distinctive and well documented - and different in most respects from

Roskam's. A Lee forte was the synchronously flashlit - rather than floodlighted - interior. Motivated, he has explained, to show details such as "...something on a dresser...[or] it might be on a bedside table...it could be a religious symbol or a portrait of their parents... [that] could tell you an awful lot," Lee overcame the technical difficulties that kept flashlighting relatively rare in these years.^{xcii} Like several other male FSA photographers, Lee traveled with his wife; Jean Lee managed equipment such as flashguns and helped to "engage people in friendly conversation," according to biographer F. Jack Hurley, and perhaps it is she that the family regards so intently in "Negro family living in crowded quarters" (Figure 25).^{xciii} Lee used a mid-sized press camera and one or more synchronized flashguns to achieve the combination of spontaneity and detail seen in such Chicago pictures. The "stark quality" of Lee's lighting "opened up" interior spaces, noted Louise Roskam, so that "everybody could see" the details that might speak so eloquently: the pattern of a quilt, thumbtacked Valentine, lace on dresses, children's drawings on the wall, or the intricacy of a hairstyle (Figure 26).^{xciv}

The "flat flash," as Edwin Roskam called it, made its presence known in other ways as well, however; among them are the bulb's reflection in mirrors and windows as seen in a tavern shot, "Bartender and owner of a tavern on the south side," (Figure 27), and the harsh shadows in other images. It is "used to eliminate all possible atmosphere, so that the picture becomes a bare, brutal kind of inventory of poverty, or ...the picturesque," noted Roskam, perhaps sounding harsher than he intended.^{xcv} Though today we might associate this seemingly artless, un-atmospheric style with the 35mm camera's flexibility, only a few Lee images were made with one, and, except for those of a presumably already well-lighted operation at Provident Hospital, these are all exteriors and street scenes.

Further suiting Lee for the Chicago teamwork was his penchant for photographic series, for work whose details were not only in the individual print but also in the coverage as a whole. "A taxonomist with a camera," in Stryker's later much-qualified

phrase, Lee visually “takes apart and gives you all the details” of a subject; “he lays it on the table and says, ‘There you are, Sir, in all its parts.’”^{xcvi} Describing a photographer so attuned to the Cayton-Warner rhetoric of anatomizing and interconnecting, and so responsive, it would seem, to Cayton’s plan to “attach to each [photograph] the pertinent facts which I have in my files,” Stryker’s characterization sums up the qualities that - whether by prescient choice, or by FSA exigency - make Lee in retrospect the indispensable Chicago man.^{xcvii}

The picture set titled “Relief Family” achieves the image-text synergy that Rosskam sought and Lee could manage so well. The sequence covered the family of eleven posed in “Family on Relief” (Figure 28), focusing on their life in a small frame house “in an extreme state of disrepair,” as the pictures show, rather than an apartment. The father has had no job except occasional WPA work for seven years, so that all eleven live on his monthly relief check of about \$25 (perhaps \$300 today). “Four [of the family’s nine] children sleep in two beds in an attic under the roof where the plaster has peeled off and the rain pours in,” apparently shown in “Upstairs bedroom of a family on relief” (Figure 29), and “rats and vermin” are common.

Unable to eat healthily on their relief allocation - “How am I going to buy meat and green vegetables for eleven on one relief check?” exclaimed the mother - the malnourished children were often sick. Indeed, an exterior shot shows Dr. Arthur G. Falls at the door, where Lee’s unusual exterior use of flash tellingly contributes a brilliant shine to the doctor’s elegant shoes (Figure 30). Another picture places him at a sick child’s bedside (Figure 31), linking this segment to “The Day of a Negro Doctor,” which follows Dr. Falls, one of Bronzeville’s 300 black doctors, from housecalls, to his office, his rounds at Provident Hospital, and to his home, a new house in the so-called “Demonstration Area” along State Street in the South 90s, which Rosskam describes as “a small Negro island in a lower middle-class white community,” comprised of “substantial stone houses recently built and beautifully kept, surrounded by smooth lawns

and pretty gardens” (Figures 32 and 33).^{xcviii} Although the general caption mentions Falls’s “difficulties [as] a Negro professional,” noting that because “a great majority” of his clients are on relief, he makes “barely enough to keep him going,” the cross-referenced “Demonstration Area” pictures offer an opportunity to contrast his home with those of his patients, a juxtaposition which garners little sympathy for the doctor. The “consultations cash” sign in his office, and the information provided in the “Demonstration Area” caption that the area is “restricted by its own Negro residents to homes costing a minimum of \$5,000” (perhaps \$150,000 today) and that most have cost a great deal more, underscore the degree of contrast between Dr. Falls and many of his patients (Figure 34).

“This family is certainly not the only one on relief in this picture coverage,” Rosskam notes drily in “Relief Family.” The situation in “Recent Immigrants” explains what happens when there is “recent addition from the South.” A family with several children were recently “augmented by two of the wife’s sisters and their children and by the wife’s brother,” so that “now there are eleven people living in four rooms, all on the same relief check,” Rosskam writes; “House in a Negro section” shows some of the family and their house (Figure 35). The city’s three-year residence requirement barred any of the recent arrivals from public assistance. Despite “broken windows ... attached with papers and cartons” and an “indescribable state of disrepair” including “leaking roof, ratholes in the floor, falling plaster, and a mattress with ‘gaping hole,’” Rosskam notes a “decent and clean living room” and an “older boy” in high school, “making a strenuous effort to improve himself and the lot of his family;” he is shown holding a young relative in “Family on Relief” (Figure 26). Linking this coverage to the images in “Pattern for Growing Up,” Rosskam stresses there the burden on family life of such unemployment and overcrowding, so that “the family, brought more or less intact from the rural South may crack in the squalor and overcrowding of the city.”

The Chicago pictures chosen for *12 Million*, overwhelmingly grim, give little

sense of the careful engagement throughout the community that informs the coverage as a whole. They include only a few images of worship and leisure, and no pictures of the city's emerging urban black middle class (Figure 36); such fortunates were, Wright explains in his preface, only "fleeting exceptions" to the "plight of the humble folk who swim in the depth."^{xcix} Meant to represent features of Northern urban life in general, just as the Southern pictures in earlier chapters are metonymic of all Southern rural life, the chosen photographs were selected and cropped to exclude sky, horizon, or recognizable landmarks (Figures 37 and 38). Portraits of families, and of children or adults in various settings are in square or horizontal formats, without monumentalizing angles, side views, or other evident formal manipulation (except for flashlighting) (Figures 25 and 39). As in other print versions of FSA images, pictures may be cropped - sometimes, as on page 108, eliminating a family member from the group portrait, or as Nicholas Natanson has noted, they may be slightly retouched to eliminate (perceived) flaws such as a child's protruding tongue, as in the reproduction of "Negro family living in crowded quarters" (Figure 25), on page 110.^c The images in general are printed quite dark in the book, so that in cityscapes, or images of walled in spaces such as those on pages 96 and 138 (Figures 20 and 40), backgrounds read as gray or gray-black tones. In other images, graphic contrasts of figure and ground replace the play of detail and gradation of shadow that might be seen in a differently made print. Comparing the FSA print titled "Members of the Pentecostal church on Easter Sunday praising the Lord" (Figure 7) to its reproduction on page 92 of the first edition, for instance, we can see that Roskam's decisions about cropping and printing have emphasized the dramatic tonal contrast between the singers' white robes and the brick wall of the church behind them, instead of bringing out any details, and that two distracting, dangling lightbulbs behind the singers have been removed in the darkroom.

In July 1942, the Historical Section officially became part of the OWI, its sole purpose to produce government publicity material for domestic and overseas use. Pictures

that showed “the increasing participation of blacks and various other groups in the war effort” were “frequently requested,” by both government public relations agencies and commercial white-controlled media, writes photographer Jack Delano.^{ci} The Section’s unabashed pivot toward “people with a little spirit” and “statements of our strength,” as Stryker wrote to photographers in May 1942,^{cii} provoked some cynicism, as expressed in one insider’s irreverent doggerel:

When the sun went down on the FSA
...Our agile Roy didn’t mope and cry
He shifted his payroll to OWI.
Now his pictures are pretty; his farmers fat
His colored folks gleam like grandpa’s high hat....^{ciii}

The OWI’s propaganda effort certainly glossed over segregation and ignored history. It directed Hollywood filmmakers, for instance, to avoid reference to “[t]he fact that slavery existed in this country,” and to consider it “something which belongs to the past and which we wish to forget at this time when the unity of all races and creeds is important.”^{civ} Nevertheless, the depiction of unity required that American media seek to portray “the Negro as a normal human being and an integral part of human life and activity,” as a pungent directive from NAACP Director Walter White requested.^{cv} Thus, at a time when no African Americans worked as staff photographers at any nationally circulated magazine or metropolitan newspapers, the OWI photography project can be seen to increase the archive of counter-stereotypical images begun by the FSA, and it can be credited with fostering the careers of African American photographers Gordon Parks and Roger Smith.^{cvi} Parks, subject of Chapter X, remained at the agency until 1945 and valued his FSA/OWI years, however constrained, as an apprenticeship that provided the knowledge, confidence, and versatility to succeed in photojournalism.^{cvii} And when the cash-strapped *Ebony* magazine, subject of Chapter X, started up in 1945, determined to “mirror the happier side of Negro life - the positive, everyday achievements from Harlem

to Hollywood,” it found in OWI images by Parks and others a crucial, low-cost resource.^{cviii}

Jack Delano’s Bronzeville images made in spring, 1942 (and a few made the following year), exemplify the OWI approach. Although the agency’s need for immediately useful publicity images, and its concerns about patriotism at home and positive image abroad, were constraining, they also encouraged photographers to feature “the contribution of blacks not only to the economy but also to American culture” generally, Delano remembered.^{cix} At the federally-funded, segregated Ida B. Wells housing project, completed in January 1941, “where many black musicians and other artists lived,”^{cx} several exemplary families were named and covered extensively, and Delano posed 102 year old Mrs. Ella Patterson, the project’s oldest resident, with her great grandson in Figure 41. At Good Shepherd Community Center, Delano recorded both a steel workers’ union meeting and the author Langston Hughes rehearsing members of his Skyloft Players theater company (Figures 42-48).^{cxii} He visited “a[n interracial] group of young fellows who are living cooperatively in a large house on the south side” (Figure 49), and at the South Side Community Art Center he photographed a painting class - including a young Gordon Parks - and a poetry study circle (Figures 50 and 51). At the Chicago *Defender* production plant he augmented Lee’s series of deftly-posed workplace portraits (Figures 52 and 53). As Delano must have known, the circulation and power of black newspapers - “established institutions” and “by far the most important agencies for forming and reflecting public opinion” - were increased by the outbreak of war.^{cxiii} Nationwide, the black press carried on a wartime “Double V” campaign, insisting that democratic victory be achieved at home as well as abroad. Like the others, the *Defender*, oldest and best known of Bronzeville’s several weekly newspapers, urged blacks to support the war but called as well for an end to racial segregation and discrimination in all areas of American life. Delano’s calmly competent *Defender* workers may have served to counter the attacks, denunciations, and, eventually,

investigations for sedition provoked by the Double V campaign.^{cxiii}

In extended sequences on two successful musicians and their families, Delano showed drummer Red Saunders, the long-time leader of the house band at the Club DeLisa, a South Side institution, posed with his family in their comfortable Indiana Avenue apartment and strolling in the park, as well as working at the popular, white-owned club.^{cxiv} Drummer Oliver Coleman was likewise shown as a hardworking family man earning a good living - perhaps, as with Saunders, family was included to clarify the men's draft-exempt status (Figures 54-57). Emphasized in the sequence is Coleman's proud membership in Local 208 of the American Federation of Musicians, one of the largest locals in the country and then led by activist president Harry W. Gray. Gray's "first official act in 1937," according to Chicago memoirist Dempsey Travis, was to demand, successfully, of the DeLisa brothers that they double the pay scale of the Red Saunders Orchestra.^{cxv}

Delano's Chicago coverage resembles other "ethnic group" series of the war years in its insistently celebratory tone and often-static, posed quality. And, like the FSA/OWI collection as a whole, it presents no immediate challenge to racialized stratification. And yet, as we have seen, the images provoked and stimulated, recorded and educated, and, not least, they endured. The existence of such an archive, certifying the determined inclusion of African Americans in a public, explicit, and future-oriented narrative, signified and bolstered the forces gathering to change racist laws, governments, and customs. As Delano expanded his subject matter, moving beyond family, work, and neighborhood, his images suggest the "national black community taking imaginative shape in the collective life of Bronzeville," described by historian Adam Green.^{cxvi} They portend the transformations soon to come.

- ⁱ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, introduction by Richard Wright (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1945), 397.
- ⁱⁱ See Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 16.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*. (New York: Viking Press, 1941; rpt. Thunder's Mouth, 2000), 3.
- ^{iv} Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940).
- ^v Quoted in *Book of the Month*, February 1942, clipping held in Wright Papers, Box 63, Folder 741, Beineke Library, Yale University. Hereafter Wright Papers. ~~Wright~~.
- ^{vi} Wright, *12 Million*, ~~Wright~~, 30.
- ^{vii} Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper, 1954).
- ^{viii} Dorothea Lange, *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1939), Archibald MacLeigh, *Land of the Free* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), and James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941).
- ^{ix} Wright, *12 Million*, 27.
- ^x *Ibid.*, 98, 99.
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, 107.
- ^{xii} Edwin Rosskam, general caption, "The Black Belt - An Environment," Chicago, April, 1941, RA/FSA/OWI Written Records, microfilm reel 17, Library of Congress.
- ^{xiii} Wright, *12 Million*, 142.
- ^{xiv} Kenneth W. Warren, "Appeals for (Mis)recognition: Theorizing the Diaspora," in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 397.
- ^{xv} Wright, *12 Million*, 146.
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, Wright, *12 Million*, 100.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.*, 146-147.
- ^{xviii} Horace Cayton, Pittsburgh *Courier* column, n.d., Richard Wright Papers, Horace Cayton Correspondence, Box 63, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Beineke Library, Yale University. Cayton writes: "I had an opportunity of looking over the entire 1500 shots which were taken in Chicago alone. When I had finished, my reply to Rosskam was that I, who had helped to pick out the scenes and had worked with him in Chicago, could not believe what I had seen." Nicholas Natanson, *The Black Image in the New Deal: The Politics of FSA Photography* (Louisville, University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 147, numbers the FSA Chicago series at 420 images; Natanson discusses the coverage and the book at length, 142-177, and 244-256.
- ^{xix} Russell Lee to Roy E. Stryker, April, 1941, Roy E. Stryker Papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, Detroit, and San Francisco. Hereafter AAA.
- ^{xx} Clara Dean Wakeham to Jack Delano, April 3, 1941, Roy E. Stryker Papers, AAA.
- ^{xxi} Interview with Edwin and Louise Rosskam by Richard K. Doud, August 3, 1965, AAA, 45. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, introduction by Richard Wright (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1945).
- ^{xxii} Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 147.
- ^{xxiii} Addison Gayle, *Richard Wright: Ordeal of a Native Son* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), 139.
- ^{xxiv} Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967, I Dream a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 128; Gordon Parks, *A Choice of Weapons* (New York), 190, 199.
- ^{xxv} See Houston A. Baker, *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *'Who Set You Flowin'?: the African American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- ^{xxvi} Natanson, 64.
- ^{xxvii} D.L., *PM Weekly*, November 2, 1941, in Wright Papers, Box 63, Folder 741.
- ^{xxviii} William P. Robinson to Richard Wright, November 30, 1942; Miss Bessie Jones to Richard Wright, January(?) 2, 1942; [anonymous]"a girl that wanted to write" to Richard Wright, January 8, 1942, all in

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Box 63, Folder 740, Wright Papers.

^{xxxix}Rossskam-Doud interview, AAA, 46. Over the project's lifetime, Stryker ensured that FSA photographs appeared in museum exhibitions and in a dozen photo and text books, as well as in more topical forms of journalism and government publicity, so that, at its 1942 demise, the project could claim exhibition venues including the Museum of Modern Art and Grand Central station, as well as regular appearances in periodicals including *Life*, *Look*, *Time*, the *New York Times*, and *Fortune*.

^{xxx} John Field Mulholland, *Christian Century*, February 18, 1942, in Box 63, Folder 741, Wright papers. More modestly, photographer Russell Lee found the book "a very swell job," the text "excellent" and Rossskam's work doing "better than [to] illustrate it" because "the pictures fit in most homogeneously." Lee to Stryker, November 12, 1941, Roy E. Stryker papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, AAA.

^{xxxj}Rossskam to Wright, n.d., Wright papers, Box 105, Folder 1585.

^{xxxk}C. Gerald Fraser, "For Roy DeCarava, 62, It's Time for Optimism." *New York Times*, 6 Jun. 1982, 60.

^{xxxlii} Even *12 Million Black Voices* did not escape. In April, 1942 *Coronet* magazine featured an excerpt that includes, besides Wright's condensed running text from the book, so-called "original verse" captions keyed to each picture, in (bizarrely) "the colorful folk style of Paul Laurence Dunbar's 'Lyrics of Lowly Life,'" according to Wright's biographer Michel Fabre (235).

^{xxxliii} Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," in Angelyn Mitchell, ed., *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 104.

^{xxxliv} Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, xviii.

^{xxxlv} Robert Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," in *Race and Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 356. See Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) for discussion of Wright's and other authors' uses of Chicago sociology.

^{xxxvii} Wright, *12 Million*, 146.

^{xxxviii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxix} John M. Reilly, "Richard Wright Preaches the Nation: *12 Million Black Voices*," *Black American Literary Forum* (1982), 16: 117 (116-19); J.V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 11 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House: 1954) 348-349.

^{xl} Reilly asserts that it was actually in sociology, again the writings of Robert Park, that Wright found a needed elaboration of the status of national minorities in specifically modern society. Park, whose approach to sociology was informed by wide-ranging experience and who had worked closely with Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, saw that in "modern civilization, depressed social groups tend to assume the form of nationalities," that "nationalist movements are analogous," and that "these movements have invariably had the general character of a renaissance, a nationalist or racial rebirth" (117). Richard Wright, *American Hunger* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 82.

^{xli} Reilly, 117. Reilly demarcates the writer's relation to culture, writing that while "the institutional life developed in the shadow of slavery and the folkways that constitute realization of the meaning in suffering represent the culture that denominates the Black nation," it is "self-conscious literature speaking to and for a Black audience" that can "animate the transformation of Afro-Americans into a modern citizenry" (117).

^{xlii} Reilly notes the text's repetition of key terms and phrases, its frequent allegory and metaphor even as myriad facts are put forth, its frequent asides, as to a listening audience: "How did this paradoxical amalgam of love and cruelty come to be? Well, men are many and each has his work to do" (24). Crucially, "Lords of the Land" and "Bosses of the Buildings" personify capitalist evil; the racializing term "Negro" is a "psychological island" with "rocky boundaries" (30), and, personified in fifteen paragraphs, "the kitchenette" which "reaches out with fingers full of golden bribes to the officials of the city" wreaks havoc: it is "author of the glad tidings that new suckers are in town, ready to be cheated," is "our prison, our death sentence without a trial," and, finally, "the funnel through which our pulverized lives flow to ruin and death on the city pavements, at a profit" (109-11). But differently from the "actual" sermon presented in the center of the book, Wright's secular narrative must conclude not with the "end of Time and of Death," but with entry into "the sphere of conscious history" (147), and so there is throughout "a significant ambivalence," Reilly notes, toward Euro-American culture, as the bearer both of slavery's brutality and of "a new world culture...a higher human consciousness" (12). Thus, Reilly argues, Wright's secular text reinscribes the "fortunate fall" familiar in sacred oratory as a "fortunate contradiction" leading to "historical, rather than divine, salvation" (117).

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^{xliii} [Reilly, 118.](#)

^{xliv} [Ibid.](#)

^{xlv} [Joseph B. Entin, *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* \(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007\), 215. Gilroy, 161.](#)

^{xlvi} [Keneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre, eds., *Conversations with Richard Wright* \(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993\), 44, 43.](#)

^{xlvii} [Drake and Cayton, 12; Nicholas Lemann *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* \(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991\), 64.](#)

^{xlviii} [These statistics are drawn from several sources. See Edwin Rosskam, general captions, "The Face of the 'Black Belt,'" and "The Black Belt - An Environment," Chicago, April, 1941, RA/FSA/OWI Written Records, microfilm reel 17, Library of Congress; Richard Wright, *12 Million*, 93, 107; Adam Green, "*Selling the Race: Culture, Production and Notions of Community, and in Black Chicago, 1940-1955*" \(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 Ph.D. diss. Yale University, 1998\), 33, 34.](#)

^{xlix} [Richard Wright, "The Shame of Chicago," *Ebony*, December, 1951, 24.](#)

^l [Wright, *12 Million*, 142.](#)

^{li} [I am indebted to Adam Green, *Selling the Race*, for this and other crucially useful conceptualizations of the South Side community in the 1940s.](#)

^{lii} [Horace Cayton to Richard Wright, April 29, 1941, Richard Wright Papers, Box 95, Folder 1254, Beinecke Library, Yale University.](#)

^{liii} ["Project shots" are discussed in Natanson, *The Black Image in the New Deal*, 34, 59. The wide range of FSA subject matter is discussed in my "'The Record Itself': Farm Security Administration Photography and the Transformation of Rural Life," in Pete Daniel, Merry A. Foresta, Maren Stange, and Sally Stein, *Official Images: New Deal Photography* \(Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987\), 1-35.](#)

^{liv} [Quoted in *Ibid.*, 4.](#)

^{lv} [Kinnamon and Fabre, eds., 43.](#)

^{lvi} [My own work has contributed to this critique. For many relevant citations, see "The FSA-OWI Collection - Selected Bibliography and Related Web Sites." Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. December 29, 2001 <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahml/fabib.html>>. Sally Stein, "In Pursuit of the Proximate: A Biographical Introduction," in Jack Delano, *Photographic Memories* \(Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997\), xv.](#)

^{lvii} [Horace Cayton, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, n.d. clipping held in Wright Papers, Box 63, Folder 741, Beinecke.](#)

^{lviii} [Agee and Evans, ix.](#)

^{lix} [Wright, *12 Million*, 10-11.](#)

^{lx} [Henry Lewis Gates, Jr., "The Face and Voice of Blackness," in *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710-1940*, ed. Guy C. McElroy and Christopher C. French \(Washington, D.C.: Bedford Arts, Publishers in association with the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990\), xxix.](#)

^{lxi} [Ibid., xxix, xlv. - See my "'Photographs Taken in Everyday Life': *Ebony's* Photojournalistic Discourse," in Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* \(New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001\), 207-227, for discussion of media representations of African Americans in the pre-Civil Rights era.](#)

^{lxii} [Ira Harkey, quoted in Carolyn Martindale, *The White Press and Black America* \(Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986\), 55.](#)

^{lxiii} [Jesse L. Jackson, "Growing Up with *Ebony*," *Ebony*, November 1995, 50J.](#)

^{lxiv} [Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Colored People, A Memoir* \(New York: Vintage Books, 1995\) 19, 23.](#)

^{lxv} [Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present* \(New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000\), xvi-15.](#)

^{lxvi} [Camara Dia Holloway, *Portraiture & the Harlem Renaissance: The Photographs of James L. Allen* \(New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1999\), 13. The ways that African Americans remained excluded "as producers of their own image" in the "public sphere of cultural representation" are discussed in Gayle Ward, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* \(Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000\), 124.](#)

^{lxvii} [Holloway, 15.](#)

^{lxviii} [Bolden was discussing the work of photojournalist Charles H. \(Teenie\) Harris, who worked for the nationally distributed paper from the 1930s through 1950s\[?\] in \[author tc\] "Black Life, In Black and](#)

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White," *New York Times*, February 7, 2001, E3.

^{lxix} Natanson, 68; information officer Trapnell is quoted in Natanson, 57.

^{lxx} Natanson, 36.

^{lxxi} Roy Emerson Stryker to Russell Lee, June 26, 1941, Roy E. Stryker Papers, Series I, University of Louisville, Photographic Archives. Hereafter Louisville. Natanson, 66.

^{lxxii} Natanson, 4; Stryker is quoted in Natanson, 61.

^{lxxiii} From Jack Delano and Edwin Rosskam to Roy Stryker, "Potential coverages in the near future," n.d., Stryker Papers, Louisville.

^{lxxiv} "Memo from Russell Lee," November 14, 1941, Stryker Papers, Louisville.

^{lxxv} Rosskam-Doud interview, AAA, 13.

^{lxxvi} Lee refers to Chicago as the "terminus" or "terminal point" for migration in two letters to Stryker. See Russell Lee to Roy E. Stryker, [April, 1941] and April 9, 1941, Roy E. Stryker Papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, AAA.

^{lxxvii} Lee to Stryker, April 25, 1941, Stryker Papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, AAA.

^{lxxviii} Cayton to Wright, February 5, 1941 and March 29, 1941, Wright Papers, Box 95, Folder 1254, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

^{lxxix} See Horace R. Cayton, "Negro Housing." St. Clair Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations in the Chicago Negro Community* (Chicago: W.P.A. District 3, 1940); Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939).

^{lxxx} Lemann, 368.

^{lxxxi} Drake and Cayton Warner?, 772-770.

^{lxxxii} *Ibid.*, 776.

^{lxxxiii} See Lee to Stryker, April, 1941, Stryker Papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, AAA. In any case, the photographs show scenes of work only in Bronzeville shops and businesses.

^{lxxxiv} Lee to Stryker, April 9, 1941, Stryker Papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, AAA.

^{lxxxv} Drake and Cayton, 385.

^{lxxxvi} Delano, 50.

^{lxxxvii} Lee to Stryker, April 25, 1941, Stryker Papers, microfilm reel NDA 31, AAA.

^{lxxxviii} Elder Lucy Smith is described and quoted in Cayton and Drake, 643-645, 648; Cayton and Drake discuss "lower class" religion generally on pages 611-657.

^{lxxxix} Pilgrim Baptist, where singer Mahalia Jackson got her start, is discussed in Drake and Cayton, 622, and in Green, 628ff.

^{xc} "Street photography" would flourish in the postwar work of Robert Frank and Helen Levitt, among others, as discussed in Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984). Its "thoroughbred lineage" descending from 1930s work is precisely articulated in Max Kozloff, "A Way of Seeing," in David Featherstone, ed., *Observations* (Carmel, Calif.: Friends of Photography, 1984), 67-80. ~~ote~~ote: Miles Orvell compares the "spontaneity and fluidity" of John Vachon's work to Frank's in "Portrait of the Photographer as a Young Man: John Vachon and the FSA Project," in Townsend Ludington, ed., *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), page 319.

^{xc1} Lee "took more photographs and spent more time in the field than any of his [FSA] colleagues," notes Robert Reid in Reid and Viskochil, 4.

^{xcii} F. Jack Hurley, *Russell Lee, Photographer* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., Morgan & Morgan, 1978), 17.

^{xciii} Hurley, 19.

^{xciv} Louise Rosskam in Rosskam-Doud interview, AAA, 20.

^{xcv} Edwin Rosskam in Rosskam-Doud interview, AAA, 31.

^{xcvi} Hurley, 14.

^{xcvii} Cayton to Wright, February 5, 1941, Wright Papers, Box 95, Folder 1254.

^{xcviii} Dr. Falls is identified in Reid and Viskochil, 150.

^{xcix} Wright, *12 Million*, xix.

^c Natanson, 251.

^{ci} Delano, 84.

^{cii} Qtd. in Stange, *Symbols*, 133; qtd. in Orvell, 315.

^{ciii} Delano, 88.

^{civ} Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and*

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Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 179.
cv *Ibid.*, 87.
cvi Ben Burns, *Nitty Gritty: A White Editor in Black Journalism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 98. On Roger Smith, see Nicholas Natanson, "From Sophie's Alley to the White House: Rediscovering the Visions of Pioneering Black Government Photographers," *Prologue*, Special Issue: Federal Records and African American History (Summer 1997, Vol. 29, No. 2).
cvii *Interview with Gordon Parks by Steven Plattner, 10 November 1979. University of Louisville Special Collections, Ekstrom Library, Louisville, Kentucky, 6.*
cviii "Backstage," *Ebony* (November 1945), Volume 1, no. 1, 1.
cix Delano, 85, 86.
cx *Ibid.*, 86.
cxii Reid and Viskochil and Reid, -124; Rampersad, 32-33.
cxiii Drake and Cayton, 399.
cxiv *The Defender's war-time coverage and editorial policies, including participation in the "Double V" campaign, is discussed in Drake and Cayton, 400-412.*
cxv Dempsey J. Travis, *An Autobiography of Black Chicago* (Chicago: Urban Research Institute, 1981), 130, 472.
cxvi Travis, 128-129.
cxvii Adam Green, "Selling the Race: Cultural Production and Notions of Community in Black Chicago, 1940-1955" (Ph.D. diss. Yale University, 1998), 38.

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